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SUBJECT: HOT, TENSE SUMMER AWAITS JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Classified By: DCM Geoffrey Pyatt, for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

11. (S) SUMMARY: An unknown group claiming to be Al Qaeda's Indian wing has made and distributed in Jammu recorded statements declaring jihad on India. The Indian Army and several trusted analyst and journalist sources have scornfully dismissed the claim as a hoax, similar to last year's publicized claim of Al Qaeda's arrival in J & K. According to GOI data, infiltration has increased roughly 30 percent compared to last year at this time, and tourism, especially by foreigners, is drastically down. The annual Armanath Yatra pilgrimage kicks off on June 20, with thousands of pilgrims expected to participate, stoking annual fears that terrorists will target these pilgrims. India's Home Secretary is visiting J & K this week for the first time since taking office to discuss security for the upcoming pilgrimage. END SUMMARY.

PRESENCE OF AL QAEDA IN JAMMU DOUBTED BY GOI, EXPERTS

12. (S) On June 8, 30 copies of a DVD and a written statement were circulated in Jammu, from persons claiming that a Kashmiri chapter of Al Qaeda was declaring jihad in India. The DVD featured a masked man, claiming to represent a group calling itself Al Qaeda fil,al-Hind (Al Qaeda in India), exhorting Kashmiri Muslims to rise up against India. He went on to condemn both factions of the Hurriyat Conference and Pakistani Kashmir-based United Jihad Council. Post spoke to our contacts in Kashmir, who noted that this claim comes almost one year to the day after a similar claim of "Al Qaeda in Kashmir" was made via a phone call in June 2006 to a news agency in Srinagar. Last year's claim is widely regarded as a hoax, since no Al Qaeda activity followed the phone call. Sajjid Lone, of the People's Conference, Naeem Khan, Chairman of the J&K National Front, Yusuf Jameel, Asian Age correspondent, and Izhar Wani, AFP Correspondent in Srinagar, all told Post this year's claim is likely a hoax or a diversionary tactic on the part of some other group.

13. (S) Kuldeep Khoda, Additional Director General of Police, CID, J & K told us that Al Qaeda has not yet disavowed the

group, as it would have been expected to by now, so he thinks it too early to jump to conclusions either way. Indian media reported statements by both Hurriyat factions, the United Jihad Council and even Lashkar-e-Toiba, all of whom claimed ignorance of this group, and stated their skepticism that it is the real thing.

¶4. (S) The Indian Army, speaking to Indian media through an unidentified &senior official,⁸ expressed strong doubts that Al Qaeda is operating in J & K, adding that no radio interceptions or interrogations have given any support to the claim. The Army spokesman stated the Army's theory that the ISI is behind the hoax, to &ensure some amount of deniability for its cross-border support to militancy.⁸

INFILTRATION INTO J & K GREATER THAN LAST YEAR

¶5. (C) Khoda gave Post a June 13 official Indian government update on infiltration numbers for 2007:

January) May: 206 (was 162 for the same period in 2006)
April: 82 (was 43 for the same period in 2006)
May: 85 (was 60 for the same period in 2006)

Both Wani and Jameel confirmed that infiltration is on the rise, and exceeds last year's figures.

TOURISM ON THE WANE

¶6. (S) Several Embassy contacts in J & K unanimously

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confirmed to us that tourism has dropped drastically compared to last year. G.N. Butt, proprietor of Clermont Boat House, specified that those few coming are domestic, adding that foreign tourists are staying away. Riaz Shadad of Welcome Hotel noted that no tourists from Gujarat or Bengal have come yet this year, when they were expected. Journalists Wani and Jameel both agreed that tourism was down significantly from last year, and Wani claimed &a hundred thousand less than last year.⁸ Khoda calculated a 30 percent decline in tourism numbers this year. The hotel and recreation people are holding out hope for numerous pilgrims to come and make up for the loss, when the annual Armanath Yatra pilgrimage kicks off on June 20, and is expected to last two months.

KASHMIRI REACTION TO MUSHARRAF'S CRISIS

¶6. (S) Jameel noted that due to President Musharraf's recent political difficulties, Delhi is putting talks with Pakistan on the back burner, which means the moderate Kashmiri position favoring dialogue is going nowhere. Sajjad Lone added that Musharraf's weakness makes India overconfident and arrogant, and less willing to work on a Kashmir solution, preferring to settle scores. This, coupled with Syed Shah Geelani gaining ground among Kashmiris, is causing the usually moderate Mirwaiz Umar Farooq to harden his stance. Naeem Khan, Chairman of the J & K National front (together with Mirwaiz's Hurriyat) told PoL FSN that he is concerned, because &Musharraf was flexible and Hurriyat was supporting his efforts) we hope he regains his strength.⁸ Wani and Lone concurred that the situation in Pakistan, with Musharraf weakening, is having a negative affect in J & K, and the Hurriyat is disturbed.

INDIA'S HOME SECRETARY TO VISIT KASHMIR JUNE 13

¶7. (S) Indian media reports that GOI Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta will soon travel to J & K for the first time since taking over his job in March 2007. He will reportedly meet with J & K Chief Minister Ghulan Nabil Azad and Governor LTG S.K. Sinha to discuss the security situation, specifically

security arrangements for the pilgrims expected to pour into J & K this month on the annual Armanath Yatra pilgrimage. Media reports that the Israeli Deputy Chief of General Staff Major General Moshe Kaplinsky will also visit J & K at the same time for talks with Indian Army commanders of the 16th Corps Headquarters at Nagrota on the outskirts of Jammu.

COMMENT: TROUBLE BREWING IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR?

18. (S) COMMENT: Media reports suggest trouble is brewing in J & K, with infiltration definitely on the rise, although upticks in violence in the region are not unusual at the onset of summer. The fact that many tourists are staying away suggests the average Indian may be worried about the situation, too, and the Home Secretary,s visit to discuss security indicates that the GOI is concerned as well. The annual Armanath Yatra pilgrimage has been a target for terrorists in the past, although security crackdowns in recent years have prevented most major attacks. While the Indian Army, analysts and journalists in J & K strongly doubt the claims of Al Qaeda establishing itself in J & K, the police remain cautiously skeptical, although no one will dismiss the potential for a violent attack to occur. END COMMENT.

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